LONDON BASED HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHED THE ACCUSATIONS ONLY DAYS BEFORE PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING FLEW TO KIGALI IN RWANDA TO ATTEND A SUMMIT CONFERENCE OF FRENCH-SPEAKING AFRICAN NATIONS.

AMNESTY SAID SOLDIERS OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN CAPITAL OF BANGUI LAST MONTH SHOOTING, STABBED, SMOTHERED OR BEAT TO DEATH UP TO 100 SCHOOLCHILDREN ROUNDED UP FOR PROTESTING MANDATORY SCHOOL UNIFORMS.

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INEVITABLY, EMPEROR BOKASSA'S REACTION TO THE CHARGES, RATHER THAN THE FRENCH PRESIDENT'S AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR FOSTERING THREE-WAY COOPERATION AMONG ARAB, EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES, CAUGHT THE SUMMIT LIMELIGHT.

NEWS FROM PARIS THAT THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE'S AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE HAD BACKED UP AMNESTY'S CHARGES CAUSED A SENSATION AMONG THE AFRICAN LEADERS.

FIVE AFRICAN NATIONS AGREED TO CARRY OUT AN O' THE SPOT INQUIRY IN BANGUI "AT THE EXPRESS REQUEST OF HE EMPEROR."

MR. GISCARD D'ESTAING SAID FRANCE WOULD DRAW THE APPROPRIATE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE REPORTS BY LEGAL EXPERTS FROM IVORY COAST, RWANDA, TOGO, SENEGAL AND LIBERIA.

IN AN IMMEDIATE REACTION, FRANCE SUSPENDED MILITARY AID PENDING THE OUTCOME OF THE INQUIRY, AND SAID FURTHER MEASURES MIGHT FOLLOW WHEN THE SITUATION BECAME CLEARER.

AS MORE REPORTS TENDING TO CORROBORATE THE KILLINGS CAME IN, IT LOOKED AS THOUGH FRANCE WAS PREPARING TO STOP AID ALTOGETHER, A MOVE THAT WOULD BE A SEVERE BLOW TO EMPEROR BOKASSA.

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THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE'S ECONOMY IS IN A PERILOUS STATE, KEPT BARELY AFLOAT BY INJECTIONS OF FRENCH AID ACCOUNTING FOR HALF THE NATIONAL BUDGET.

FRANCE HAS EVEN HAD TO STEP IN TO PAY CIVIL SERVANTS WHO WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE GONE WITHOUT WAGES.

BUT PARIS WILL BE RELUCTANT TO CURTAIL AID PROGRAMS IN HEALTH, FARMING AND COMMUNICATIONS IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THIS CAN ONLY INCREASE HARDSHIP AMONG ORDINARY PEOPLE IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S POOREST COUNTRIES.

THERE ARE ALSO IMPORTANT STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS. THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE BORDERS ON TROUBLED ZAIRE AND CHAD, BOTH OF WHICH HAVE NEEDED FRENCH MILITARY HELP TO DEAL WITH GUERRILLA THREATS.

EMPEROR BOKASSA IS STAUNCHLY, EVEN EMBARRASSINGLY PRO-FRENCH AND IF HE IS TOPPLED THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT HIS SUCCESSOR WILL NOT SUCCUMB TO SOVIET OR CUBAN INFLUENCE, UPSETTING THE POWER BALANCE IN THE HEART OF AFRICA.

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FURTHERMORE, FRANCE IS DEEPLY INTERESTED IN ASSURED ACCESS TO THE COUNTRY'S URANIUM RESERVES NOW BEING PROSPECTED BY FRENCH TECHNICIANS.

THE 58-YEAR-OLD EMPEROR, ONCE A SERGEANT IN THE FRENCH ARMY, EXHIBITS STEADFAST DEVOTION TO FRANCE.

HE WEPT AT PRESIDENT DE GAULLE'S FUNERAL IN 1970, SAYING HE HAD LOST A FATHER, AND INSISTS ON REFERRING TO MR GISCARD D'ESTAING AS "MY VERY DEAR PARENT." THE PRESIDENT WAS HIS GUEST ON A HUNTING SAFARI LAST YEAR.

THE EMPEROR MODELED HIS CORONATION ON THAT OF NAPOLEON IN NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL IN 1804. HE WORE AN ELABORATE ROMAN-TYPE TOGA AND SAT ON A GILDEN THRONE IN THE FORM OF GIANT EAGLE'S WINGS.

IT WAS A BRIEF SHOW OF GLORY THAT BROUGHT JOURNALISTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD TO BANGUI AND DIVERTED ATTENTION FROM PERSISTENT REPORTS OF SEVERE REPRESSION AND VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE.

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TENSIONS CAME TO A HEAD IN JANUARY WHEN YOUNGSTERS RIOTED IN PROTEST AGAINST MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ORDERS THAT THEY SHOULD WEAR UNIFORMS FEW IF ANY COULD AFFORD TO PAY FOR. THE UNIFORMS WERE MADE BY A FIRM OWNED BY THE EMPEROR.

SOURCES IN PARIS SAID THE RIOTS WERE PUT DOWN WITH THE HELP OF ZAIREAN TROOPS CALLED IN BY EMPEROR BOKASSA.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TOOK A MONTH TO COMPILE ITS DOSSIER ON THE REPORTED MASSACRE ON APRIL 18. THE ORGANIZATION'S SPOKESWOMAN IN PARIS SAID THE KILLINGS WERE AN OUTBURST OF VIOLENCE AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF CONSTANT VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

THE AMNESTY REFRESENTATIVE, GLORIA ARBEY, TOLD REUTERS THAT NGARABA CENTRAL PRISON, WHERE MOST OF THE CHILDREN WERE SAID TO HAVE BEEN KILLED, WAS KNOWN IN BANGUI AS "THE HELL".

"WE HAVE REPORTS THAT PRISONERS ARE CRAMMED INTO UNVENTILATED CELLS, WITHOUT LIGHT. SOME HAVE NOT SEEN THE LIGHT OF DAY FOR UP TO THREE YEARS, AND STARVATION AND SICKNESS ARE RAMPANT," SHE SAID.

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MRS ARBEY SAID THE PRISON HAD A SPECIAL SECTION FOR POLITICAL DETAINEES KNOWN AS "THE RED DOOR".

"FEW OF THOSE WHO GO THROUGH THAT DOOR EVER COME OUT ALIVE," SHE ADDED.

AMNESTY WAS UNABLE TO ESTIMATE NUMBERS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. SOME WERE HELD AT NGARABA PRISON AND OTHERS IN SPECIAL CELLS IN VARIOUS GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN BANGUI.

THE EMPEROR TOLD A REUTERS CORRESPONDENT IN KIGALI THAT SCORES OF STUDENTS WERE KILLED IN RIOTS LAST MONTH, BUT INSISTED THEY WERE GROWN UP AND NOT CHILDREN.

HE SAID "A MILITARY-TYPE CAMPAIGN WAS CARRIED OUT BY MARXIST STUDENTS FOLLOWING ORDERS FROM A FOREIGN POWER. THE AIM WAS TO OVERTHROW THE EMPIRE."

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